



Legislative Update

5/4/2012

Good day,

I've scheduled four town hall meetings this month around the district to field questions about the 2012 legislative session and any other issues of interest or concern to attendees.

The first is set for 2-3:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 30, at the South Whidbey Senior Center in the Fireside Room at 14594 State Route 525 in Langley.

The second takes place from 6:30-8 p.m., May 30, at the Oak Harbor Senior Center in the Multipurpose Room at 51 SE Jerome St. in Oak Harbor.

The third is the next day, Thursday, May 31, from 2-3:30 p.m. at the Washington State University Extension Center in the Sakuma Auditorium at 16650 State Route 536 in Mount Vernon.

The fourth is from 6-7:30 p.m., May 31, at the Stanwood Community and Senior Center in the Social Room at 7430 276th St. NW in Stanwood.

I hope I'll see you at one of them!

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PROTECTING OUR REGION'S FARMS AND AGRICULTURAL CHARACTER

One of my top priorities, in this and any other year, is doing everything we can in the Legislature to maintain farming as a viable way of life in our state — and this year I'm happy to report continued success in passing legislation to protect and preserve our farmlands.

The Legislature passed two bills I sponsored this session. The first was [Senate Bill 6082](#), which requires the state Department of Ecology to more fully assess the potential impacts of projects that

could affect, or are located on, land designated by local governments for long-term commercial agricultural use. I proposed this bill early in the 2012 session — after months of consultation throughout 2011 with Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland, the Western Washington Agricultural Association and regional farmers — and while we didn't get quite as much as I wanted, I still feel the improvements we made were well worth the hard work from everyone involved.



Under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), lead governmental agencies such as the Department of Ecology must follow a checklist to evaluate the likely impacts of proposed projects on air, water, earth, plants, animals, glare and numerous other factors. Until the passage of this bill, the state guidance regarding an assessment of impacts of proposed projects on locally designated agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance has been optional.

My legislation directs Ecology to conduct a review and to update the checklist to ensure it is adequate to allow for consideration of impacts on adjacent agricultural land, drainage patterns, agricultural soils, and normal agricultural operations. To assure the checklist is updated, the legislation fixes a deadline of December 31, 2013, as the completion date.

Having grown up on a farm on Camano Island, I've watched farming all but vanish from Camano and I truly consider farmers an endangered species out here in western Washington. As industry and development come in, we need to know what kind of impact it will have on agriculture, and this bill ensures that. This bill gives agriculture the stature it deserves when the state is evaluating projects that might affect our farmlands.

Another bill I sponsored, [Senate Bill 5343](#), gives operators of anaerobic digesters — energy plants that take dairy farms' animal waste and transform it into energy — more time to find ways to reduce their sulfur emissions. This is important on two fronts: the digesters help our dairy farmers manage the considerable manure their operations produce, and they provide a valuable renewable energy source in the form of biogas.

Without this bill, local businessmen like Kevin and Daryl Maas might have had to shut down their digesters, which provide jobs while establishing a new technology that needs time to perfect. This bill buys them and others that time by creating a five-year window in which they can learn to fine-tune how their digesters operate and control emissions.

The Maas' company operates one digester west of Mount Vernon and another west of Lynden and is in the process of building a third digester west of Enumclaw. Each of those digesters plays a crucial role in helping our dairy farmers on this side of the mountains manage the vast amounts of animal waste produced by their farms in a way that protects our water supply and creates energy at the same time.

GOVERNOR SIGNS BALANCED BUDGET

This week the governor signed the first state budget in four years that makes no cuts to K-12 or higher education, reflecting the priorities of legislators who drew a line in the sand and refused to cut education this year during intense and protracted budget negotiations.

From the time the last budget was approved in 2011 to the start of a special legislative session in November, revenue forecasts had dropped by \$1.7 billion. The solution to that challenge included the nearly half-billion-dollar early action package passed in December, improving caseload and revenue outlooks for the state, reductions to some state services, fund transfers and accounting changes, and some targeted revenue.

After the governor vetoed specific provisions of the budget, the state has a projected reserve of \$311 million.

The budget was carried in [House Bill 2127](#). You can find [more information here](#).

MORE PROGRESS ON EDUCATION

I am relieved that we were able to spare K-12 and higher education from budget cuts this year. But that's not all we did. Making the most of our state's limited resources, we passed legislation to expand the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields in all our classrooms and to help our youngest students enter school ready to learn.

Key education bills passed this session included:

- [Senate Bill 6041](#), which promotes important STEM fields in all our classrooms. This bill extends STEM funding that until now has been available only to middle and high schools to elementary schools. It also directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Education (OSPI) to designate elementary schools best suited to share promising practices for engaging students at an early age in STEM programs.
- [House Bill 2159, which](#) expands aerospace opportunities by implementing STEM programs geared toward aerospace careers. This bill provides \$700,000 for high schools to implement training programs to prepare students for jobs as entry-level aerospace assemblers, for skill centers to implement enhanced manufacturing skills programs, and for high schools to implement multidisciplinary programs with specialized STEM courses.
- [House Bill 2492](#), which ensures better understanding of the fiscal impact of agency rulemaking on schools by requiring the state Board of Education to provide a local school district fiscal impact statement on any proposed rules and to hold a hearing on it.

WE ARE HAPPY TO HELP YOU DURING THE LEGISLATIVE INTERIM

As always, if you have a concern, I want to hear it. The best ways to reach me during the legislative interim are by [e-mail](#), at my Olympia office at **360-786-7618** staffed by Legislative Assistant Nova Gattman or at my local Oak Harbor office at **360-682-6274**, which is staffed during the legislative interim by Legislative Assistant Gina Bull.

I will only be able to send one more e-newsletter out next week before election-year restrictions take

effect through November, but you are still always welcome to contact me through [email](#), [my website](#), or my offices in Oak Harbor or Olympia if I can be of assistance.

Thank you for reading my email newsletter. I appreciate your interest in the legislative process. If at any time you decide you no longer wish to receive updates from me, please go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/subscriptions/member.aspx?member=haugenm> to remove your name from the list.

